



Alihana Osmanov (center) and Adam Mezhev (right) are determined to persevere as they get ready for race in Central Park. The Chechnya natives are in the city to be fitted with high-tech prosthetic legs donated by NYU Medical Center. Photo by Andrew Savulich/Daily News

Delivering a future

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Manhattan hosp gives prosthetic limbs — and hope — to 2 Chechen amputees

TWO AMPUTEES from Chechnya are set to run a 5-kilometer race in Manhattan this weekend — but that's a walk in the park compared to what they have planned for next year.

After they're fitted with high-tech prosthetic legs by an NYU Medical Center doctor, Adam Mezhev, 22, and Alihana Osmanov, 20, want to compete in the New York City Marathon.

"You never know until you try," Mezhev said of the 26.2-mile race.

Mezhev stepped on a land mine when he was 10 years old and lost a leg. In the hospital, he became friends with Osmanov,

who lost a leg and part of an arm when he was hit by artillery fire in his backyard.

In their war-scarred Russian homeland, the two friends play soccer on a team for disabled athletes — using old, cheap prosthetic devices.

The Achilles Organization, which aids disabled athletes, has been trying to bring the pair to the United States for two years so they could get state-of-the-art artificial legs.

"After two years of e-mailing, calling and five or six failures

with their exit visas, they're finally here," said Dr. Nina Cerfolio, a clinical associate professor at NYU Medical Center. "I feel great."

Mezhev hopes his new leg will free him from endless blistering, and Osmanov is looking forward to walking without a limp.

"I don't have words," Osmanov said. "I have too much emotion."

Both men will be fitted for the legs today, but it will take time for them to get used to the equipment. NYU Medical is donating

the prosthetic legs, worth a total of about \$20,000.

The men won't be able to use the legs for Sunday's Hope and Possibilities race, an annual event organized by Trisha Meili, the jogger raped and beaten in Central Park in 1989. Instead, they will cross the finish line on crutches — then settle in for four weeks of rehabilitation before returning home.

Dick Traum, founder of the Achilles Organization and an amputee, invited them to come back to the city for next year's marathon.

They readily accepted.

"I love to do any sports because it brings me back to normal life," Mezhev said. "I don't know if the prosthetics will work, but I hope."